

The English Renaissance

2. The Renaissance and Humanism

2.1 Two striking features of Renaissance

2.1.1 People's desire and curiosity for classical literature

2.1.2 People's enthusiasm and interest in humanities activities

2.2 The Beginning of the English Renaissance

- **Thomas More: *Utopia***
- written in the form of a dialogue between More and a returned voyager, divided into 2 volumes.
- The first volume: a discussion on the current state of England
- The second volume: an ideal communist society, utopia, in Greek “no place”

2.3 Literary Features of the Renaissance Period

2.3.1 Translation occupied an important place.

2.3.2 Describing discoveries and adventures prevailed.

2.3.3 Sonnets were introduced to England from Italy, and the blank verse was also used for the first time in England.

2.3.4. Drama was the highest achievement: **William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.**

2.4 Types of Drama

■ The Miracle Play

also called mystery play, based on Bible stories

■ The Morality Play

uses allegorical (寓言的) characters to express the conflict between good and evil

■ The Interlude

a short performance inserted into a play to activate the mood of the masses after the solemn plot, indicated the arrival of English Secular (世俗的) drama in the late 16th century

■ The Classical Drama

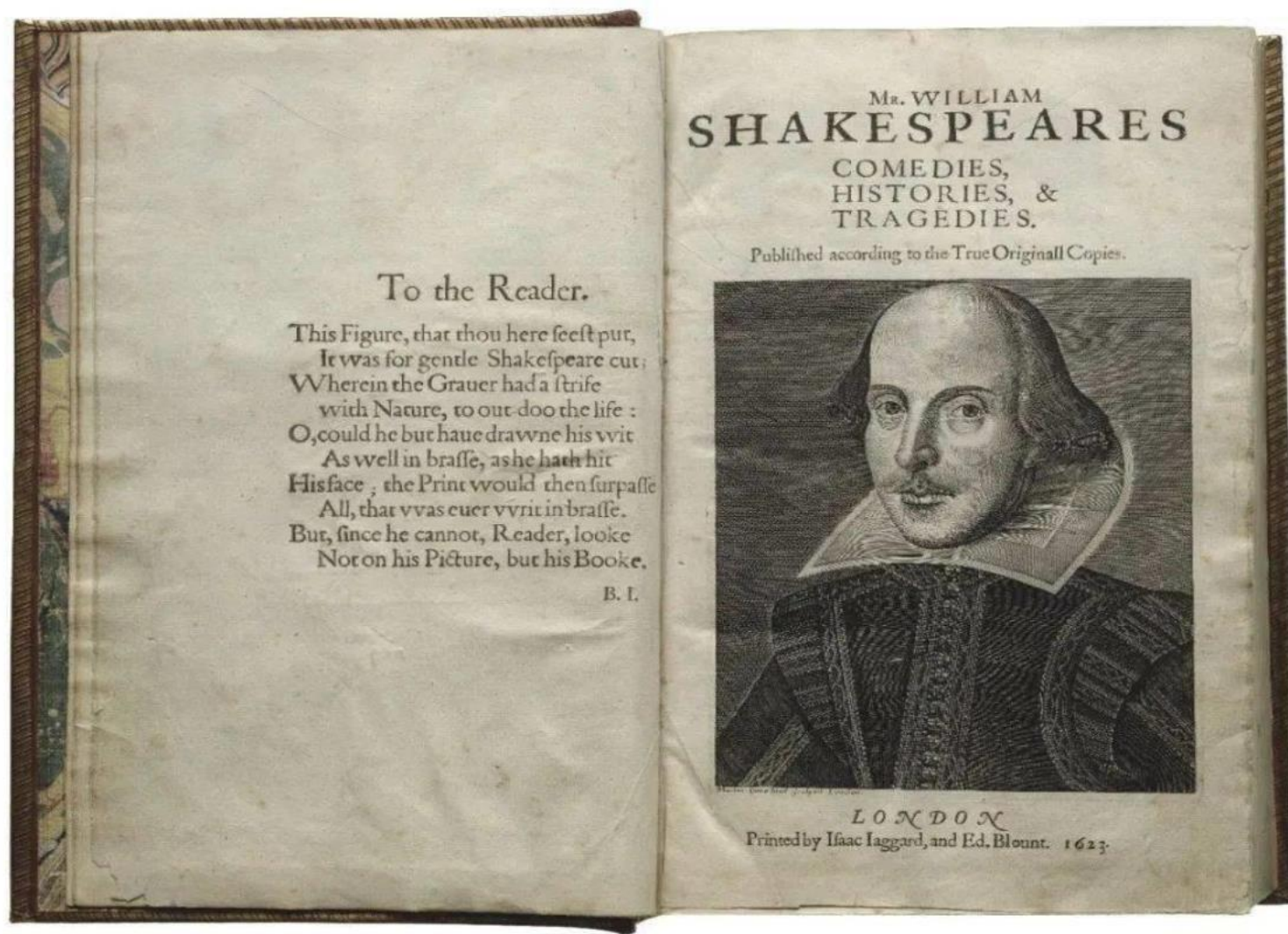
- English playwrights came into contact with Greek and Latin drama.
- the more exact conceptions of comedy and tragedy, and the orderly division into five acts
- Three Unities

- the three principles derived by French classicists from Aristotle's [Poetics](#)
- The classical unities or three unities in drama are:
- **The unity of action:** a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.
- **The unity of place:** a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.
- **The unity of time:** the action in a play should take place over no more than 24 hours.

3. William Shakespeare's Plays

3.1 Periods of Shakespeare's Plays

- 37 plays of Shakespeare have been passed down to today.
- Histories and comedies before 1600, such as *Henry VI*, *Love's Labour's Lost*; *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice* (*Romeo and Juliet* is exceptionally tragic)
- Tragedies from 1600 to 1608 including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*
- Tragicomedies and romances from 1608 to 1612, such as *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*



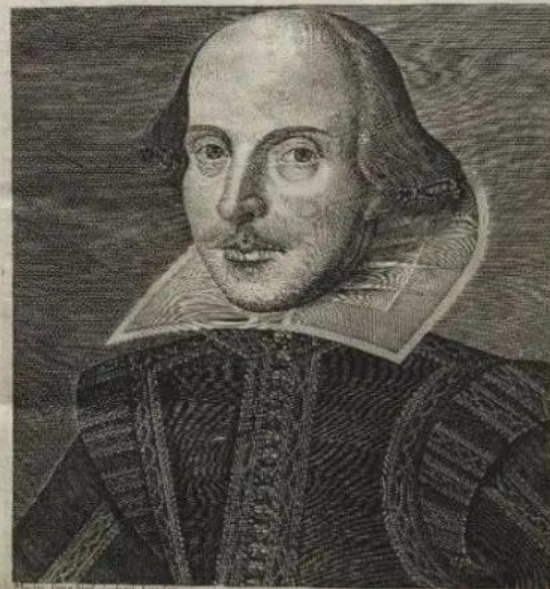
To the Reader.

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut:
Wherein the Grauer had a strife
with Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but haue drawne his vvrit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face, the Print would then surpasse
All, that vvas euer vvrit in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

B. I.

MR. WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARES
COMEDIES,
HISTORIES, &
TRAGEDIES.

Published according to the True Originall Copies.



LONDON

Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

第一本《莎士比亚剧本合集》（First Folio），1623年，
福尔杰莎士比亚图书馆藏（Folger Shakespeare Library,
STC 22273 Fo.1 no.68）

- **Summary of *Hamlet***
- The ghost of the King of Denmark tells his son Hamlet to avenge his murder by killing the new king, Hamlet's uncle. Hamlet feigns madness, contemplates life and death, and seeks revenge. His uncle, fearing for his life, also devises plots to kill Hamlet. The play ends with a duel (决斗), during which the King, Queen, Hamlet's opponent and Hamlet himself are all killed.

T H E
Tragicall Historie of
H A M L E T,
Prince of Denmarke.

By William Shakespeare.

Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much
again as it was, according to the true and perfect
Coppie.



AT LONDON,
Printed by I. R. for N. L. and are to be sold at his
shoppe vnder Saint Dunstons Church in
Fleetstreet, 1604.

■ Act I

- Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark. Late at night, guards on the battlements (城垛) of Denmark's Elsinore castle are met by **Horatio**, Prince Hamlet's friend from school. The guards describe a ghost they have seen that resembles Hamlet's father, the recently-deceased king. At that moment, the Ghost reappears, and the guards and Horatio decide to tell Hamlet.
- **Claudius**, Hamlet's uncle, married Hamlet's recently-widowed mother, becoming the new King of Denmark. Hamlet continues to mourn for his father's death and laments his mother's lack of loyalty. When Hamlet hears of the Ghost from Horatio, he wants to see it for himself.
- Elsewhere, the royal attendant **Polonius** says farewell to his son **Laertes**, who is departing for France. Laertes warns his sister, **Ophelia**, away from Hamlet and thinking too much of his attentions towards her.
- The Ghost appears to Hamlet, claiming indeed to be the ghost of his father. He tells Hamlet about how Claudius, the current King and Hamlet's uncle, murdered him, and Hamlet swears vengeance for his father. Hamlet decides to feign (假装) madness while he tests the truth of the Ghost's allegations (指控).

■ Act II

- According to his plan, Hamlet begins to act strangely. He rejects Ophelia, while Claudius and Polonius, the royal attendant, spy on him. They had hoped to find the reason for Hamlet's sudden change in behaviour but could not. Claudius summons (召见) **Guildenstern** and **Rosencrantz**, old friends of Hamlet to find out what's got into him.
- Their arrival coincides with a group of travelling actors that Hamlet happens to know well. Hamlet writes a play which includes scenes that mimic the murder of Hamlet's father. With the intention of unveiling truth, he uses a troupe of players who were performing in the town to reenact the murder in a play. During rehearsal, Hamlet and the actors plot(计谋) to present Hamlet's play before the King and Queen.



■ Act III

- At the performance, Hamlet watches Claudius closely to see how he reacts. The play provokes Claudius, and he interrupts the action by storming out (冲出去). He immediately resolves to send Hamlet away.
- Hamlet is summoned by his distressed mother, **Gertrude**, and on the way, he happens upon Claudius kneeling and attempting to pray. Hamlet reasons that to kill the King now would only send his soul to heaven rather than hell. Hamlet decides to spare his life for the time being.
- Polonius hides in Gertrude's room to protect her from her unpredictable (不可预测的) son. When Hamlet arrives to scold his mother, he hears someone moving behind the tapestry. He stabs the tapestry and, in so doing, kills Polonius. The ghost of Hamlet's father reappears and warns his son not to delay revenge his mother.

Kenneth Branagh (left) as Hamlet, with Julie Christie as his mother, Gertrude, in Branagh's 1996 film version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.



■ Act IV

- Hamlet is sent off to England as punishment, supposedly as an ambassador, just as King Fortinbras of Norway crosses Denmark with an army to attack Poland. During his journey, Hamlet discovers Claudius has a plan to have him killed once he arrives. He returns to Denmark alone, sending his companions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in his place.
- Rejected by Hamlet, Ophelia is now desolate (孤独;悲痛欲绝) at the loss of her father. She goes mad and drowns.



Ophelia, oil on canvas, by John Everett Millais, 1852; in Tate Britain, London.



■ Act V

- On the way back to Denmark, Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard (along with a gravedigger), where they talk of the chances of life and death. Ophelia's funeral procession arrives at the very same graveyard. Hamlet confronts Laertes, Ophelia's brother, who has taken his father's place at the court.
- A duel is arranged between Hamlet and Laertes. During the match, Claudius conspires with Laertes to kill Hamlet. They plan that Hamlet will die either on a poisoned rapier(长剑) or with poisoned wine. The plans go awry(出岔; 出错) when Gertrude unwittingly (无意中)drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Then both Laertes and Hamlet are wounded by the poisoned blade(剑锋). Hamlet uses the sword to kill Laertes who before dying reveals that Gertrude died at the hands of Claudius through poisoning.
- Hamlet, in his death throes(垂死挣扎), kills Claudius. Before dying, he declares that the throne is given to Prince Fortinbras of Norway.
- Hamlet dies, leaving only his friend Horatio to explain the truth to the new king, Fortinbras, as he returns in victory from the Polish wars. The newly appointed king gives Hamlet a royal funeral.

- *Hamlet*, written by William Shakespeare around 1600, is a tragedy that explores themes of **friendship, madness, and revenge**.
- **The theme of revenge in *Hamlet***
- There are two young men bent on avenging their father's death in this play. Hamlet and Laertes are both on the same mission, and while Hamlet is pondering his approach to the problem Laertes is hot on his heels(紧追不舍), determined to kill him as Hamlet has killed his father, Polonius. This is, therefore, a double revenge story. Shakespeare examines the practice of revenge by having two entirely different approaches to it – the hot-headed abandon of Laertes and the philosophical, cautious approach by Hamlet. The two strands run parallel – invoking comparisons, each one throwing light on the other – until the young men's duel and both their deaths. The revenge theme feeds into the religious element of the play as Hamlet is conflicted by his Christian aversion(厌恶) to killing someone and his duty to avenge his father's death, whereas it is not a consideration for Laertes, whose duty is clear to him, and he acts on it immediately.

■ ★★What Is the Meaning of Hamlet's Famous Quote “**To be or not to be**” ?

□ Hamlet's Speech

- “To be or not to be” is one of the most famous lines in all of English literature. It appears in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It marks the beginning of Hamlet's “To be or not to be” speech which is a **soliloquy**. The speech and the line reflect some of the existential questions that *Hamlet* the play and Hamlet the character are interested in.

□ What Is a Soliloquy?

- A soliloquy is a speech made by one character. The speech does not actually represent spoken words but the thoughts and feelings of the character speaking (therefore, it is assumed that even if other characters were to “listen in” on a character who is giving a soliloquy as Polonius and Claudius do, they would not really hear the speaker, in this case Hamlet.)

- A soliloquy is different from a **monologue** because the speaker is alone on stage and is considered to be speaking to the audience. In a monologue, the speaker addresses an audience that does not interject or offer comments
- A soliloquy is not to be confused with an **aside**. An aside, like a soliloquy, represents words that a character speaks that are “heard” only by the audience and represent that character's thoughts or feelings. Unlike a soliloquy, an aside is a brief statement, usually uttered in the midst of dialogue. Also, asides are usually denoted by stage directions while soliloquies are not.

❑ So What Does It Mean?

- There are many “meanings” in Hamlet’s speech and there are entire essays written on them and how they relate to the play as a whole. What I offer here are some generally accepted interpretations and observations of the speech.
- 1) The speech represents Hamlet’s contemplation of suicide. Hamlet questions whether it is a viable solution to his problems.

- 2) Hamlet contemplates killing Claudius. He wants revenge but if Claudius will go to heaven, then killing will not avenge Hamlet's father.
- 3) The speech asks existential questions which have been bothering Hamlet. What happens after death? Is it better to act or to remain inactive (采取行动还是不采取行动)? Is existence (living) worth the pain? Why do miserable people continue to live?

★★Critical Themes in “To be or not to be”

- Doubt and uncertainty
- Life and death
- Madness

Theme 1: Doubt and Uncertainty

Doubt and uncertainty play a huge role in Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. By this point in the play, we know that **Hamlet has struggled to decide whether he should kill Claudius and avenge his father's death.**

Questions Hamlet asks both before and during this soliloquy are as follows:

- Was it really the ghost of his father he heard and saw?
- Was his father actually poisoned by Claudius?
- Should he kill Claudius?
- Should he kill himself?
- What are the consequences of killing Claudius? Of not killing him?

There are no clear answers to any of these questions, and he knows this. **Hamlet is struck by indecisiveness, leading him to straddle(跨越) the line between action and inaction.**

Theme 2: Life and Death

- As the opening line tells us, “To be or not to be” revolves around complex notions of life and death (and the afterlife).
- Up until this point in the play, Hamlet has continued to debate with himself whether he should kill Claudius to avenge his father. He also wonders whether it might be preferable to kill himself—this would allow him to escape his own “sea of troubles” and the “slings and arrows” (无妄之灾) of life.
- But like so many others, **Hamlet fears the uncertainty dying brings and is tormented by the possibility of ending up in Hell**—a place even more miserable than life. He is heavily plagued (困扰) by this realization that the only way to find out if death is better than life is to go ahead and end it, a permanent decision one cannot take back.
- Despite Hamlet’s attempts to logically understand the world and death, there are some things he will simply never know until he himself dies, further fueling his ambivalence (助长了他的矛盾心理).

Theme 3: Madness

- The entirety of *Hamlet* can be said to revolve around the theme of madness and whether Hamlet has been feigning madness or has truly gone mad (or both). Though the idea of madness doesn't necessarily come to the forefront (前言; 焦点) of "To be or not to be," it still plays a crucial role in how Hamlet behaves in this scene.
- Whatever the case, it's clear that Hamlet is an intelligent man who is attempting to grapple with a difficult decision (努力做出艰难的决定). Whether or not he is truly "mad" here or later in the play is up to you to decide!